

Sharing My Experiences: Mandela Washington Fellow Mahamadou Camara

"Know your strength and stick to it."

Malian entrepreneur Mahamadou Camara's day job is simple but fulfilling. The owner of a translation and consulting company with language teaching facilities, Camara translates business documents into English and helps executives register their businesses with local authorities.

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After work, Camara does something else important. He recently started a nongovernmental organization focused on bringing health education to his country's rural communities, particularly to mining areas, where thousands of workers live clustered in small tents with minimal access to basic supplies. He recruits a few people in each area and trains them to identify cases of malaria and other diseases. Camara's organization then refers the sick people to larger groups that can provide medical care.

Camara believes that "educated, empowered and engaged" young people are the key to moving Africa forward. "African youth need to trust their potential and believe in themselves," he said.

"We (young leaders) have to be the change we seek. ... This belief has been strengthened by my participation in the Mandela Washington Fellowship."

Since returning home from his summer fellowship, Camara has been sharing information about his experience through radio broadcasts. With the U.S. embassy in Bamako, he facilitated a meeting with several members of the local news media so he could tell them about YALI.


Camara encourages young Malians to apply for a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellowship and helps them draft their personal statements.

"The advice I have been giving others is to write the truth about yourself. Try to know your strength and stick to it because that is what will make the difference."

Recently, Camara and other YALI members from Mali launched the Yali Mali network. He maintains regular contact with his colleagues at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta where he studied business.

"This YALI program has had a positive impact on my activities. I want other young people to have that opportunity to help enhance things in their daily lives," he said.

Applying to Be a Mandela Washington Fellow: Writing a Personal Statement

When you apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship, you will submit a personal statement  and other essays to introduce yourself to the selection panel. In this part of your application, you can highlight what you want reviewers to know about you.

In any personal essay, it is important to catch the reader's attention with an original, honest statement. When space is limited, it is important to compose a concise answer that highlights the work you are most proud of. Make sure you are responding directly to the question being asked and including examples or anecdotes if relevant.

Here are a few tips to help you write strong personal statements for your application:

- 1) Do not procrastinate! Start preparing your essays. It is easy to underestimate the time and difficulty involved in developing your answers.
- 2) Remember, the written application is the only information the selection panel will have when deciding the candidates who will progress to the interview stage. Do not assume the reviewers know anything about you or the topics you are writing about.
- 3) Reviewers will be reading a lot of applications. Stand out in the crowd by making your responses interesting! One way to do this is to begin your statement with an attention-grabber such as a quote or a story.
- 4) Provide concrete examples that pertain to your life, work, goals and experiences.
- 5) Be concise — do not use a lot of unnecessary words.
- 6) Check for spelling, grammar and punctuation mistakes.
- 7) Make sure your ideas are coherent throughout the essay. The person reading your essay needs to understand how your thoughts fit together.

You also may be interested in [Applying to Be a Mandela Washington Fellow: Building Your Resume](#) on yli.state.gov.

Sources: Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts; the American Medical Association in Chicago

Sharing My Experience: Mandela

Washington Fellow Fatima Ibrahim

"There is nothing you can't achieve."

"I believe that with a clear vision and commitment, there is nothing you can't achieve," said entrepreneur Fatima (Teema) Ibrahim of Nigeria.

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"I urge us all to put our heads together and make our communities better places not only for us, but also for the coming generations," Ibrahim said weeks after returning home from her Mandela Washington Fellowship.

Ibrahim uses a passion for entrepreneurship to encourage underprivileged women in her community to go into business. She enlisted some of these women to join her company, which processes and markets neem oil, sold internationally as an ingredient in cosmetics.

The 28-year-old nurtured her passion at Clark Atlanta University as part of her Fellowship. "I was impressed with the learning methods," she said, such as visiting companies like Coca-Cola, CNN and IBM to see how things really function.

Ibrahim learned about how the challenges of running an entire business differ from those of running a single division. She also learned how corporations partner with the public sector to create organizations and how they raise money to operate those new entities.

"The lessons I got from the corporate visits are priceless," she said. "Seeing how people are very much engaged in community service despite having busy schedules was impressive. This in particular gave me a renewed impetus to expand my horizon and not limit myself when I am capable of doing other things as well."

"All the things I learned during my Fellowship are attuned to what I do back home," Ibrahim said. "I learned that the way you think could either be an obstacle to accomplishments or a gateway to success," she added.

Ibrahim continues to communicate with other YALI Network members and with her community through training and mentoring. "I always like to describe this program as a system: a group of independent but interrelated elements comprising a unified whole," she said.

Of the Fellowship application process, Ibrahim said:

"It was a long journey: from the application, to the interview, to the series of procedures that we had to go through. At the end of it all, it was worth it."

She wants the YALI Network members to know that "the Fellowship is a life-changing experience. If you really have your community at heart, this program is exactly what you need to give you that push, and to accelerate your drive for change."

“My accomplishments are what I was asked to share during the interview for the Fellowship. I spoke from my heart. Now my dream of uplifting the economic status of girls and women through entrepreneurship is fast coming true.”

Applying to Be a Mandela Washington Fellow: Building Your Resume

AP Images



A successful candidate for the Mandela Washington Fellowship demonstrates an ability to get things done. Take a marketing approach to your resume that will command the ultimate amount of attention. Think about how you want the person who reads your resume to think of you.

In preparing your resume, remember three important tips:

1. Keep your answers brief.
2. Write in the third person (do not use the pronoun “I”).
3. Proofread your resume for grammatical and spelling mistakes.

Here are a few tips to help you prepare the information you will need for the required format of the Mandela Washington Fellowship resume:

- **Professional Experience:** What professional experiences have you had? Make a list of paid or volunteer positions and summarize your work in these positions to give an instant picture of the breadth of your work or volunteer background.
- **Education:** Have you received any type of formal education beyond secondary school? If so, make a list of the education and training you received from established universities, colleges or trade schools. Include the dates you attended these schools, what you studied, and what degrees or certificates you earned.
- **Professional Training:** Did you receive professional training outside of an established educational institution? Name up to five relevant professional certifications and/or training courses you completed, including the type of training or the name of the certification and the city and country where the training occurred.
- **Community and Volunteer Work:** In addition to your professional experience, do you perform unpaid work in your community? Make a list of your volunteer activities with local charities or NGOs and summarize your work with these organizations.
- **Honors and Awards:** Have you been recognized for your efforts in something that you have done? List what honors or awards you have received, from which organizations, and for what type of


work.

- **Professional Skills:** Think about the skills you have acquired over time. What languages do you speak? Are you proficient in computer and software skills?

You also may be interested in reading [Get Your Resume Noticed](#).

Sharing My Experience: Mandela Washington Fellow Setshswano Ngope

“Come prepared to offer solutions to the problems.”

Setshswano Ngope heard U.S. first lady Michelle Obama say that when she was a youngster, her parents continually told her that she was smart and could do anything she wanted to do. 

“That resonated with me,” Ngope recalled. “A lot of people don’t have that support and then end up making the wrong decisions. They don’t believe in themselves.” Ngope said, in particular, lack of confidence results in people making poor decisions about their finances.

The 31-year-old from Botswana said she had an upbringing similar to Mrs. Obama’s. If she got good grades in school, her father advised, she would have a “passport to be anything” she wanted to be. That encouragement inspired her to go into business and to help others.

A professional financial planner, Ngope teaches women and youth how to manage their money. While studying at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, during her Fellowship in July 2014, she learned how to cope with an expanding workload. “I started to rethink my approach to my business,” she said. “Now I know how I can reach more people” (with her financial literacy classes).

“Already, I am facilitating collaboration with my government, my company and U.S. organizations around this cause of financial literacy and financial inclusion.”

In what she describes as a “priceless” Fellowship experience, Ngope also learned about managing a business. “There is a big difference in the way you manage a startup as opposed to the way you manage a company that has existed for a long time,” said the active YALI Network member, who interned at Standard Chartered Bank in New York as part of the Fellowship.

Ngope is able to share what she learned during her time as a Mandela Washington Fellow with her community in Botswana:

“I am telling my co-workers that this has been a valuable experience that will have benefits years into the future. I share with them all the books we have read during the Fellowship, and the


[names of] various organizations that are doing impact investing and development work across the globe.”

To YALI Network members who are interested in applying for the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellowship, she said: “I would encourage the 2015 applicants to be very thorough in articulating their community engagements. They must also apply well on time, as the questions can be quite engaging.”

“The interviews are very rigorous, so they must come prepared to offer solutions to the problems they see in their communities. Lastly, if selected, they must come to the U.S. with an open mind and be ready to learn all they can about how to uplift their communities post-Fellowship.”

Signing On, Linking In

The YALI Network can be a powerful tool for African development. It can be a powerful tool for your development, too.

People in the YALI Network are business owners, social entrepreneurs and professionals. All  these smart, energetic people can achieve much more if they share their ideas and resources and work together. They can help each other build their careers while they build 21st-century Africa.

The YALI Network group on LinkedIn makes it easy to network across the continent without having to travel. LinkedIn allows a virtual gathering of like-minded individuals who describe what they do, how they achieved success and their visions and goals for the future.

The YALI Network group on LinkedIn is a directory of professionals, whose credentials are verified by their contacts. Among the YALI Network LinkedIn group’s 1,600 members, more than half are senior executives, managers, business owners or directors. They run nonprofits but also information technology companies, financial institutions, management consultancies and marketing firms. And they come from all over Africa.

Join the [YALI Network group](#) on [LinkedIn](#) to:


- Access knowledge and opportunities in careers that are of interest to you;
- Build your professional network;
- Share your experiences, ideas and vision with other young leaders;
- Find the information you need to grow your career, business or organization;
- Establish regular contact with people who share your interests and goals.

Engaging with others on LinkedIn can build your foundation and your reputation. Your network can help you identify resources and support for the interests you are pursuing.

For more guidance on LinkedIn, you can try this video from the site itself, [The Value of LinkedIn](#).

It all starts with the simple act of joining.

Meetup Promotes Collaboration and Partnership


YALI Network members in Takoradi, 
Ghana, discuss shared interests. Photo
courtesy Renee Smith.

The YALI Network Meetup platform has become a [YALI Network face2face Facebook Group](#)!

In Abuja, Bujumbura, Kampala and many other cities across Africa, members of the YALI Network are building new relationships and networking with other young leaders in their communities. They're coming together to share ideas, collaborate on new ventures, offer training and pass on knowledge.

Young leaders in these cities are using [Meetup](#), an online platform that supports networking and collaboration. It is a tool for empowerment, a mechanism that allows like-minded individuals to find each other, arrange meetings and convene discussions to further their shared goals.

More than 400 members of the YALI Network are now using the tool, making arrangements for over 100 different gatherings.

Members of the YALI Network gathered 
in a park in Abuja. Photo courtesy Amina
Oshiokpekhai.

Olusegun helped bring together a group in Abuja for its first meeting in a centrally-located park. For future meetings, he thinks an improved meeting space will help make the group's gatherings "more interesting, relaxing and ultimately impactful."

Amina attended the Abuja Meetup, too, and described to the group her experience in the United States as a 2014 Mandela Washington Fellow. She and another Fellow are planning another Meetup to coincide with the opening of the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellowship application process. Amina promises that her group will share "tips on how our application process went and, of course, how our lives have changed because of the Mandela Washington Fellowship."

Olusegun is also thinking about future meetings in Abuja. He wants to involve more women and people from outside the federal capital.

Thierry described the Meetup he arranged in Bujumbura. He says the group is discussing and working with resources available at yali.state.gov. They're also brainstorming ideas about how to develop stronger leadership skills.

Several like-minded business owners came together in Douala, Cameroon, through Meetup. Oliver says the group "shared our experiences and challenges facing young entrepreneurs." People who missed the first meeting are showing further interest, and the Douala group plans regular gatherings in the future.

At the [YALI Network Meetup page](#), you can see where someone is organizing a Meetup near you. If there isn't an event, take the initiative and create a new group. You set the agenda for your Meetup group, and you can use the resources available on yali.state.gov as the basis for a discussion. Some ideas include:

- Invite speakers who are knowledgeable about topics of interest;
- Plan a community project together;
- [Take a YALI Network course together](#) and discuss what you've learned;
- Discuss and share the skills of the group to see what you might teach each other.

At a Meetup people get acquainted, find common interests and identify ways they might work together to promote their interests or improve their communities.

Meetup has a lot of potential. All it really needs now is you.

[Is an Open Internet Important to You?](#)

The Internet gets credit for a wide range of social, economic and cultural advancements despite the huge differences that exist between Internet accessibility in countries around the world.

Almost 20 percent of Africans have Internet access through broadband connections on mobile phones, according to the International Telecommunications Union ([ITU](#)).

For Internet expansion to continue in Africa, experts say users themselves must help ensure access remains free and open.


Watch LaJeunesse's clip on YouTube



"It's only the free and open Internet that allows for the creativity, the innovation and the entrepreneurship," says Google's Ross LaJeunesse, "that, in turn, allows for economic development, social advancement and connection."

LaJeunesse is the head of Global Free Expression and International Relations for Google, one of the Internet's most prominent corporate entities. He meets with government leaders around the world promoting policies that will allow people with good ideas to use the Internet to pursue, develop and promote them.

Some governments don't want open policies because they prefer to control information media providing information to their publics. But the Internet allows citizens to convene their on public policy discussions online without government interventions.

Click here to watch this clip on YouTube 

An independent study shows that countries where that online discussion takes place freely— such as South Africa and Kenya — are experiencing stronger growth in the IT sector. “We’re seeing evidence that there is a correlation here,” LaJeunesse said when speaking to Mandela Washington Fellows during a July appearance.

Web users who have developed relationships and opportunities have done so in online spaces that are frequently free to use with no charge, said Suzanne Phillion, a public relations specialist representing Yahoo on the Washington panel. That gives users a personal stake in ensuring their networks remain free of government control on into the future.

“We think about [activism for a free Internet] as civic engagement,” Phillion said, “and issues that you should really be invested in for your professional, personal lives going forward.”

A free and open Internet is a priority issue for the Obama administration, with the president warning policymakers everywhere that action to restrict Internet access, availability or content will ultimately be “self-defeating.”

Internet constraints are “going to inhibit the growth of the country generally, because closed societies that are not open to new ideas, eventually they fall behind,” [Obama said](#). “They miss out on the future because they’re so locked into trying to maintain the past.”

U.S. Under Secretary Catherine Novelli is boosting the Obama administration's efforts to maintain a free and open Internet. In a recent speech at the [Internet Governance Forum](#), she emphasized how the Internet allows people with talent and good ideas to make their own opportunities.

“For example, three Nigerian university students have already helped tens of thousands of Africans secure jobs by creating a job search website called ‘Jobberman.com,’” Novelli said. “As West Africa’s most popular online career resource, Jobberman connects talented individuals with job opportunities.”

Help keep the Internet open so that you can pursue your ideas. Express your support for a free and open Internet and learn more about the issues here: openinternet.state.gov

Learn more:

“The Power of a Free and Open Internet and How Citizens Can Be Involved”

A Free and Open Internet

Internet Governance

BongoHive, Mozilla Expand Africa's Internet Base

The information technology industry has been a huge growth engine for the U.S. economy since the 1990s. Its growth rate over the last 20 years has exceeded the national average, and created more than 1.5 million jobs.

Whether Africa's expanding IT sector will be able to stimulate similar growth will depend greatly on Africans themselves, according to one industry insider.

“What value are you bringing to the table, that is the question you should always be asking yourself,” said Lukonga Lindunda, a Mandela Washington Fellow who is an information technology entrepreneur in Lusaka, Zambia.

“What value do you have that you feel Google can invest [in], not just give you free money,” is another question that Lindunda posed to his audience of young Africans as a member of a Washington panel discussion about Internet access and availability.

If Africans want to leap into the online global marketplace of goods, commerce and ideas, Lindunda said African Internet users must demonstrate that they are desirable customers who provide business expansion opportunities for huge IT companies.

Lindunda is part of the team that started the IT innovation hub [BongoHive](#). He and his partners started with just about nothing in 2011. Now they've helped link like-minded people across the continent, using social networks to connect about 100 hubs of innovation and entrepreneurship.

[BongoHive](#) pioneers are “out-of-the-box thinkers” who want to apply their own innovation and creativity to achieve sustainable progress in business, education, health and other fields.

Watch Lukongo's Full Comments Here:

[Mozilla-Uganda](#) is another nonprofit organization working to expand Internet accessibility and literacy in Africa. Mozilla is a global nonprofit organization that views the Web as a public resource to be shared. They brought together volunteers in Uganda who are bringing greater Web access to Ugandan users.

“These volunteers have localized the Firefox browser to local languages and brought that technology

to the community around them,” said Leah Gilliam, who represented Mozilla on the panel.

Mozilla is all about “making is learning.” They created the [Webmaker tool](#) to help people learn about Web development to pass it on and teach those skills to an ever-broader network of people. Listen to what Mozilla says about the Maker Party:

Listen or watch clips from the rest of this panel here to learn more, and share your thoughts about Internet innovation and expansion in Africa at #YALICHAT:

[Yahoo’s Policy of “Technology First”](#)

[IBM’s Work with African Nations](#)

Qualities to Look for in a Co-Founder

What is the Number 1 quality you should you look for in a startup co-founder and why?

Passion for the Venture: Kelly Azevedo of [She’s Got Systems](#), a business consultancy

“Passion is not something that can be manufactured. It takes a lot of dedication to push past the mistakes and pivots necessary in a new company. Without passion for the business, it is easy to lose sight of your goals. ... If you feel that your partner has lost interest and is already looking for another business or challenge, then it can sink the company even faster.”

Complementary Skill Sets: Tim Jahn of [matchist](#), which connects companies to computer program developers

“Look for somebody who likes to do what you don’t and is really good at what you’re not. You want a co-founder who brings everything you’re missing to the table, so as a team you’re the complete package. ... You want to make sure all the important skill sets are there between the two of you.”

Comfort with Conflict: Mitch Gordon of [Go Overseas](#), which organizes international study, teaching and internship programs

“Startups require a flexible, creative, open-minded team. A company that succeeds without pivoting multiple times is the exception that proves the rule. When looking for a co-founder, pay very close attention to how he [or she] handles conflict. Disagreements are necessary. You have to create an environment where experimentation is encouraged and failure isn’t necessarily looked down upon. Conflict is an opportunity.”

Vision: Jeff Slobotski of [Silicon Prairie News](#), an online publication that reports on companies in the middle of America

“If the co-founder has the ability to see well into the future while executing against the day-to-day objectives, the business has a strong chance of not only succeeding, but [of] scaling exponentially.”

Friendship: Wade Foster of [Zapier](#), an online service that helps people move data among computer applications

“You wouldn’t be friends with someone who doesn’t share similar interests. Friends are the family you choose. The best part about being friends is that you’ll stick through the rough patches. When business gets rough, and it will, your startup isn’t the only thing holding your business together — you have a friendship to fall back on. There are lots of other important qualities, but friendship is Number 1.”

Credibility: Robby Hill of [HillSouth](#), an information technology consultancy

“A co-founder has to believe in the vision enough to be able to sacrifice everything for the sake of achieving success. Your co-founder must realize this job is more than a paycheck — in both the risk and the rewards that are available. Make sure this quality is tested before bringing him or her onto the team.”

Trustworthiness: Kelsey Meyer of [Influence & Co.](#), a public relations firm

“The Number 1 quality you should look for in a co-founder is someone you can trust. Even if a co-founder messes up now and then, if you have ultimate trust, you will always be able to fix it.”

Adapted from an online article published by the Young Entrepreneur Council (YEC). YEC is an invite-only organization composed of promising young entrepreneurs. In partnership with Citi, YEC recently launched StartupCollective, a free virtual mentorship program that helps millions of entrepreneurs start and grow businesses.
